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SUBJECT: CANADA'S FM SPEAKS ON ARCTIC, AFGHANISTAN

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a November 23 speech in Toronto that had few surprises, Minister of Foreign Affairs Lawrence Cannon laid out Canada's foreign policy priorities, highlighting Afghanistan and a plan for the Arctic. While Afghanistan topped Cannon's list of foreign policy priorities, the promotion of Canada's Northern Strategy in the Arctic was the clear focus of the speech. Canada's plan for the Arctic rests on four principles: (1) exercising Canada's sovereignty; (2) promoting economic and social development; (3) protecting Canada's environmental heritage; and (4) improving and devolving governance. Though he strayed little from his prepared remarks, Cannon did respond to a question about the Northwest Passage by strongly emphasizing the view that it is the "Canadian Northwest Passage," and is "no doubt within Canadian sovereign territory." End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) In a luncheon speech to a small but influential crowd, Minister of Foreign Affairs Lawrence Cannon invoked the lyrics, "the True North strong and free" of the Canadian national anthem, devoting the majority of his speech to promoting Canada's Northern Strategy for exercising its "sovereign rights and jurisdiction" in the Arctic. He outlined the "four pillars" of the Northern Strategy: (1) Exercising Canadian sovereignty; (2) promoting economic and social development; (3) protecting Canada's environmental heritage; and (4) improving and devolving governance.

¶3. (SBU) Cannon focused most heavily on "exercising sovereignty," by emphasizing the Canadian military commitment to demonstrating control over the Arctic. In particular, he noted the establishment of a Canadian Forces Arctic Training Centre in Resolute Bay, the expansion of the Canadian Rangers, and the development of a deep-water docking and refueling facility in Nunavut. Cannon also referred to ongoing efforts to map the extended continental shelf in the Arctic (in cooperation with the U.S.) in order to bolster efforts to obtain international recognition of its claims of sovereignty, pointing to a 2013 target of making the data public. Although Cannon nearly steered clear of mentioning specific contentious claims during his prepared speech (aside from a reference to Russia "challeng[ing]" Canada's security), he responded to a pointed question from a journalism student about the Northwest Passage by strongly emphasizing the view that it is the "Canadian Northwest Passage," and is "no doubt within Canadian sovereign territory." He added that, while arctic ice is shrinking, scientists predict that currents will take melting ice toward Canada's territory, thus making probable exploitation of the Northwest Passage for commercial traffic up to 40 years away. He said settling arctic shelf claims under the law of the Sea was a more pressing issue than discussions over the Northwest Passage.

¶4. (SBU) Regarding the principles of promoting economic and social development, protecting the climate and improving governance, Cannon included few details, though he reiterated Canada's position to "vigorously" defend the practice of seal hunting and the GOC's intention to challenge the current ban at the World Trade Organization. He also noted that Canada continues to "require" foreign vessels entering what it claims to be Canadian Arctic waters to report to the Canadian Coast Guard.

¶5. (SBU) Playing off his recent visit to Afghanistan last week, Cannon also praised President Karzai's recent commitments to establishing a stable and democratic government, but noted the "significant problems" with the recent presidential election. In particular, Cannon admonished Karzai to appoint cabinet ministers and governors based on merit and to take steps to reform the justice system. Cannon also mentioned Canada's continued commitment to Afghans and allies to combat threats of global terrorism, stating that they "can count on Canada for help." Nevertheless, he reiterated Canada's own commitment to withdrawing its troops in 2011.

JOHNSON